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ABSTRACT

This booklet, which is intended for educators interested in establishing service learning programs, examines the benefits, development, and operation of intergenerational service learning programs. Discussed are the benefits of intergenerational programs in view of recent changes in family life and society as a whole. Three types of intergenerational programs are described: young people serving older adults; older adults serving young people (as mentors, caregivers, and volunteers); and older adults and youths working together. Fifteen best practice characteristics of intergenerational programs are listed. The following aspects of implementing intergenerational service learning programs are examined: recruitment of senior adult volunteers (recruitment strategies, places to find adult volunteers, concerns of senior adult volunteers); liability issues (risk management procedures, the importance of screening volunteers, other liability reduction strategies); orientation and training (strategies for training senior adults and youths separately and together, attributes of older adult learners, building intergenerational understanding); program implementation (assessing needs for service, engaging community partners, helping the generations reflect together); seven successful intergenerational service learning projects; possibilities for classroom learning (social studies, language arts, mathematics, physical education, technology education); and program evaluation. Concluding the booklet are the addresses of eight organizations with information on service learning and intergenerational programs. (MN)

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ED 430 134

LINKING LEARNING WITH LIFE

Off Their Rockers Into Service

Connecting the Generations Through Service Learning

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Off Their Rockers Into Service

Connecting the Generations Through Service Learning

by Beverly Brandes and Rebecca Green

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Linking Learning With Life

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The LINC intergenerational grant is implemented through a state partnership consisting of Clemson University, South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Office on Aging, United Way of South Carolina, and the South Carolina Department of Education.

Through a memorandum of agreement with the Department of Education and United Way of South Carolina, Beverly and Rebecca are housed in the same office. This has afforded an additional intergenerational experience for the writers. Both agree that this has served to benefit the South Carolina LINC project and partnership.

This book is dedicated to Max Lane Brandes, III and Samuel Dodson Brandes, two grandsons who have brought many very special intergenerational experiences to the Brandes family.

Preface

Volunteer and work experiences provide us with opportunities to observe the benefits of community service programs. We see lives touched...people changed...and community improvement. However, we also see the challenges brought about by a changing society. Intergenerational programming links the value of community service programs with the ongoing relationships necessary for social well being. It is the crossroads for education, recreation, social services, and character development.

The opportunity to work in intergenerational programming provides us the chance to see the benefits of generations working together to meet community needs. A goal of the statewide LINC (Linking Intergenerational Networks in Communities) project is the institutionalization of intergenerational programs throughout South Carolina. LINC communities, as well as RSVP and Foster Grandparent programs, have discovered not only the value of bringing young and old together, but also the value of maintaining those relationships.

As you read this book, it is our hope that you will recognize intergenerational programming as a vehicle to "get back to the basics" ....caring relationships, character education, and the ethic of service. Youth and older adults, working together, are making a difference all across this country.

Beverly Brandes
Rebecca Green

Why Intergenerational Progams?

The relationship between youth and older adults is one of the most natural in the human experience. Although they represent two opposite ends of the spectrum, these two groups have more in common than you may realize.

Traditionally, families were more extended and geographically centered. It was not uncommon for children, parents, and grandparents to live in the same house or at least in the same town. There was a sense of community that benefited each member of the family and made the whole unit stronger.

Extended families have been a common framework for the sharing of values. Generations living together allowed for the exchange of knowledge about family, religious, and cultural traditions. Economic, educational, and cultural independence were the results.

Older family members shared responsibility for raising the children and in turn enjoyed the benefits of continued stimulation, enthusiasm, and learning from their involvement with the younger generations.

Now times are different—in a number of ways.....

First, we are geographically spread out. Family members are more likely to move away from the home to pursue higher education or a career.

Second, the traditional family is changing. Many families are headed by only one parent while other families require that both parents work. In addition, most older adults are no longer living with the rest of the family.

Third, our society has become more segregated by age. Children

spend their days in school or daycare with other children. Adults work with others who are, for the most part, in the same age group. Older adults often live and socialize in communities or facilities that include only members of their own generation. As a result, each generation views itself as a separate entity rather than as an integral part of a larger community.

These changes in the family unit, combined with other pressures, can lead to feelings of isolation or hopelessness. When these feelings surface as children develop, they become at risk for negative behaviors, many times leading to vandalism, violence, drug use, etc. When these feelings surface in older adults, they can become depressed and withdrawn, becoming more at risk for illness and disease. Opposite ends of the spectrum run similar risks.

Over thirty years ago social scientists began to notice that our changing society had created a vacuum. There were fewer children learning from older adults and fewer older adults teaching children as they grew up. Interaction between these two age groups was markedly absent.

President John F. Kennedy took action to establish a National Service Corps for both the young and old. Congress rejected his proposal, but the idea of intergenerational programs began to take root. In 1963, the first intergenerational programs to receive federal funding were developed. Today there are hundreds of intergenerational programs across the country that are funded by many different sources.

Because until recent years the relationships between older adults and youth were so very natural, they were never really broken down into components. Upon examination (and the application of common sense) we have found that our young people and older adults need each other equally.

Children need role models. They need to learn life skills, values, and traditions. They need the insight that comes from life experiences. They need to be loved, accepted, and nurtured. And most importantly,

they need to feel that they belong to a larger family or community.

As older adults retire, they have more time and fewer distractions. They need to share their knowledge and life experiences. They have a greater need to feel of value. Through intergenerational programs, the strengths of one generation can meet the needs of another generation. Opportunities are provided for interaction among people of diverse backgrounds, ages, and life experiences.

Youth and older adults have a lot in common. They both have a need to make a contribution and to feel appreciated; both groups are eager to share their knowledge and to learn through new experiences. Intergenerational service programs provide them opportunities to have meaningful service experiences together.

Types of Intergenerational Programs

Young People Serving Older Adults.

In these types of intergenerational programs, young people may:

- visit older persons in their home or a nursing care facility
- work with Meals on Wheels program to deliver meals to the homebound
- tutor older adults in language or computer skills
- develop a phone buddies project to check on older adults each day
- help older adults with their household chores
- write letters or read for those with vision or other health problems

Older Adults Serving Young People.

In these types of programs, older adults may:

Act as a mentor

- tutor
- provide career guidance
- be a role model
- assist families in finding needed social services

Be a caregiver

- care for a child with an illness
- give family members a break

Help in daycare centers

- provide individual attention to assist workers

Work in schools and classrooms

- provide life experience programs for students
- assist teachers
- give history lessons
- serve as the school's or a classroom's service learning coordinator

Older Adults and Youth Working Together

There are many opportunities in every community for these two groups to work together:

Address community problems that affect both groups

- crime
- pollution
- drug use
- drinking and driving

Develop community beautification projects

- planting trees and flowers
- removing graffiti
- organizing community clean-ups

Share creativity

- intergenerational choir
- arts project

Serve the frail elderly

- home chores
- preparing food
- presenting a program
- writing letters
- visiting

All three types of intergenerational programs provide opportunities for both groups to benefit from the service activities and the relationships and friendships that result from working together. This guidebook, however, will be focusing on the third type of intergenerational program where youth and senior adults serve the community together.

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Best Practice Characteristics

An example of an intergenerational program where the seniors and youth work together is the LINC (Linking Intergenerational Networks in Communities) project in South Carolina. This project is led by a statewide collaborative partnership consisting of Clemson University; South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Aging; the South Carolina Department of Education; and the United Way of South Carolina.

In its work with seven pilot projects, LINC has worked to develop criteria for success. These criteria include the following characteristics:

- Program meets a documented, defined community need
- Structured community involvement in the project
- Goals are agreed upon and objectives clearly defined
- Active collaboration between systems/agencies involved in the program's development
- Roles and responsibilities of the participating professionals and volunteers are clearly defined
- Administrative and program staff are committed to the program
- Staff and volunteers are well trained
- Staff is sensitive to the needs and expectations of the participants, both young and old, professional and volunteer
- Intergenerational interactions should be planned, intimate, and rewarding for both groups
- Adequate time is allotted for effective program implementation
- Program is of manageable size
- Consistent and meaningful recognition is planned for volunteers and professional participants
- Both older and younger participants benefit
- Program is known and has status within the community
- Evaluation procedures are ongoing

Recruiting Senior Adult Volunteers

Successful recruiting requires knowing answers to the basic questions about your program before you begin the recruitment process. What are the benefits of having senior adult volunteers as a part of your program? What will their roles be? There are many roles for senior adults in intergenerational programs. It is important that you develop clear and specific roles and responsibilities (job descriptions) for your senior adult volunteers. Some may want to work directly with the youth. Others will feel more comfortable working in the office, doing recruiting, or organizing projects.

It is also important that you know the demographics of prospective volunteers. What are the general characteristics of those you wish to recruit? Where will you find these volunteers? What will motivate the senior adult to volunteer? According to most studies, senior adults are compelled to volunteer for several reasons:

- a true desire to work with others
- a desire to be involved in a particular cause
- the need to feel useful and productive

Where to Find Senior Adult Volunteers

Senior adults with a history of involvement in their community are most likely to volunteer in your program. There are many places in your community where you will find senior adult volunteers. Contact community organizations which involve senior adults personally or provide them with information about your program. For example, senior centers often look for speakers for programs or luncheons. This list of suggested organizations can get you started.

- Retired teachers associations
- Aging network organizations
- Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)
- Senior Companion Program
- Churches and synagogues
- Local AARP and Green Thumb chapters
- Foster Grandparent Program
- Fraternal organizations

- American Association of University Women
- Garden clubs
- Public libraries
- Senior housing developments
- Hospital-based senior organizations

The most effective recruiter for your intergenerational program is often a current senior adult volunteer. Senior adult volunteers can help you recruit other senior adults in many ways. As a senior, they can identify with your prospective population, so it may be helpful to bring a senior along with you when you make presentations to groups of older adults. In addition, one of the best forms of recruitment is word-of-mouth. Seniors currently involved in your program will often tell friends of their experiences. One of the signs of a well-organized intergenerational service learning program is recruitment of senior adults by current senior adult volunteers.

Concerns of Senior Adult Volunteers

Your recruitment strategies should be tailored to meet the needs of senior adults. It is important to be clear and concise when speaking with senior adults. Being able to answer the concerns of prospective volunteers is critical in making participation in your program more appealing.

There are several concerns senior adults will have regarding volunteering in an intergenerational program. Ongoing activities are the key to developing lasting relationships between the youth and the senior adults, and seniors will want to know exactly how much time commitment the program requires. Senior adults are given many opportunities to volunteer. They want to know that if they commit to working with your program, they will still have time for other activities. Providing senior adults with a specific day and time period in which you want them to volunteer often addresses this concern; however, many seniors will often spend more time volunteering with the program once they get involved.

They will want to know how many youth they will be working with. Include ratios of youth and senior adult participants in your goals and objectives so you can answer this question. Some senior adults will only feel comfortable in a one-on-one situation. Others will feel comfortable working with an entire classroom.

Active senior adults are often offended by use of the terms "old" or "elderly." Be sensitive to these concerns when you develop the mission of your intergenerational service learning program. Frail senior adults in a nursing home do not want to be thought of as useless. It is important that the activities implemented in your program be worthwhile and age-specific.

Finally, it is important to address their fears that they might not be able to interact well with the children, or that they have nothing to offer. Do not address them as a "captive" audience, rather as a group of senior adults with wisdom and experience that they can share with the youth.

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Liability Issues

Liability is an extremely important issue in service learning and especially when volunteers are involved. Volunteers are liable for recklessness, bad faith, maliciousness, criminal violations, and wanton and willful disregard for human rights, safety, or property.

Risk management procedures need to be in place.

- Identify risks of each volunteer position.
- Think about the conditions of the work environment and any accidents that might occur due to unsafe premises.
- Consider any special needs or limitations clients may have.
- Emphasize the importance of following specific procedures to safely complete a task.

Screening of volunteers is an important component of risk reduction.

- All volunteers should be interviewed prior to placement to determine their suitability, interest, qualifications, capability, and commitment to the volunteer job.
- Volunteers should undergo a criminal records check before assuming the role of caretaker for a child.
- Potential volunteers who are under the care of a physician for either physical or psychological treatment may be asked to present a certificate from their physician verifying ability to safely perform their duties.

Other strategies.

- Require signed releases and waivers from volunteers and participants.
- Recruit, train, and supervise responsibly.
- Include methods for performing duties, specific instructions on specific tasks, dangers to be aware of and avoid, and procedures for emergencies.
- Develop policies regarding training, supervising and disciplining volunteers, removing problem volunteers quickly to avoid any further complications.

Orientation and Training

The service learning methodology, supported by a growing movement across the country, can enhance and reinforce the intergenerational movement in many ways. It is not only advantageous that youth and older adults **serve** together; it is equally important that they have opportunities to **learn** together.

Educators are being encouraged to teach about aging. Students need to develop attitudes that see aging as a lifelong process. They need to understand that the decisions they make now will have an impact on the quality of their later lives. Once they understand the aging process, myths and stereotypes will be dispelled and they can appreciate roles and relationships in families and realize the opportunities and challenges of an age-diverse world. To quote a teacher, "'Old' shouldn't be a dirty word. By our words and actions, we adults can demonstrate that growing, learning, and changing are part of life at all ages."

On the other hand, adults need to be trained and prepared before working in a classroom service learning project. For most, times have changed since their last experience with school, and it is important that they not only be trained on working with youth, but also on the roles and policies of their project/work environment.

Once both groups have been trained on issues relating to both groups, the service experience will be more meaningful and rewarding.

Orientation for Senior Adults

Once you have made presentations and distributed information about your program, it is important to be prepared to utilize the volunteers you recruit. Welcome the senior adults to your program and provide them with an orientation to both your program and the training they will need. Orientation should include basic information about your program and organization, including program goals and objectives, the roles and responsibilities of the senior adult volunteers, and your expectations.

Training Senior Adults

Training for senior adults should include the program goals, objectives, roles, and responsibilities, and should address stereotypes about youth. If necessary, training should provide information on any special populations with which they will be working, such as at-risk youth or special needs youth. Information on intergenerational activities and service learning should be part of this preservice training.

Training senior adult volunteers should be an ongoing process. Preservice training will provide the volunteers the skills they need to begin working with the youth. Inservice training will provide volunteers ongoing development of those skills. Senior adults have specific learning styles, so it is important that training be focused on their learning styles. Training needs to be user-friendly, specific, and concise. It should excite the senior adults about the program.

It is important to include team building and problem-solving activities in training so the senior adults feel comfortable with each other, the program, and their roles. Using different mediums such as role-playing, overhead transparencies, videos, and discussion allows you to facilitate involvement by the senior adults. Remember that any handouts or overhead transparencies should be in large, bold print.

During discussions, encourage participants to share personal experiences related to your topics. These experiences are not only good teaching examples for the trainer, but also facilitate analysis of situations and personal beliefs, stereotypes, and attitudes. It also recognizes the importance of the senior adult as a mentor with wisdom and experience that can be passed on to the youth. Finally, work to provide a comfortable learning environment for the senior adults. Be aware of environmental factors such as room temperature and set-up, seating, lighting, and noise levels. By providing refreshments, you allow the senior adults time to get to know each other.

If the senior adults will be working in a school setting, it is important that you meet with school personnel to outline a training plan for

the volunteers that will meet the needs of both the senior adults and the schools. The teachers and school personnel will need to fully understand your program and the role of the senior adult volunteers. It is important that they respect the volunteers and the program goals and objectives. In addition, the senior adults will need to know the guidelines and rules of the schools. Remember, education has changed a lot since the seniors were in a classroom—as a student or a teacher. The senior adults will also need specific training in the service learning concept. Be aware that involving the senior adult volunteers in the preparation stage of service learning is crucial to gaining program support from, and retaining, the senior adult volunteers.

Attributes of Older Adult Learners

Generations Together has compiled a list of attributes of older adult learners that trainers should be aware of in order to create a supportive and productive learning environment that is well-suited to older learners. Therefore, take into account that older adult learners:

- bring a lifetime of background, skills, and experience to any learning situation
- are generally self-directed in their learning
- approach educational activities with a life-centered, problem-centered, or task-centered orientation
- are motivated to learn by their need for self-esteem, self-confidence, and creative expression
- tend to focus on social and occupational role competence and need opportunities to identify the competency requirements of their new ocupational role
- need to integrate new ideas into the body of knowledge they already possess
- need to participate in their own learning

- tend to compensate for being slower in some sensory and psychomotor learning tasks by being more accurate and making fewer trial-and-error ventures
- may need training in learning strategies they never developed or have forgotten
- learn best in informal groups where they can utilize others as resources
- respond to a structured learning environment that enables them to measure their progress with respect to their expectations
- bring values, beliefs, and ideas to the learning environment that may be in conflict with some contemporary views
- tend to take their errors personally and are more likely to let them affect their self-esteem

Training Youth

Effective training for youth should include the program goals and objectives, information about aging—including stereotypes and myths, active senior adults versus frail seniors, and intergenerational and service learning activities. It is important to prepare youth for situations they might encounter, whether they are working with senior adults in service to the community, are serving the aging population, or are being mentored by senior adults.

Your training plan for youth needs to have a focus. What will the youth need to know before they are brought together with the senior adults? Who will do the training? How will you measure the effectiveness of the training?

A successful youth training program would:

- be interactive
- foster empathy
- include current information
- build confidence
- present opportunities for questions and answers
- be fun!
- be inspiring

It should include information about:

- program goals and objectives
- communication skills
- safety
- myths and stereotypes
- intergenerational activities
- normal aging and the frail elderly
- how to work effectively with older adults
- potential scenarios

Pretest/Posttest

Providing the youth with a Pretest/Posttest, like the following, is a valuable tool to not only let the participants know what their views are, but also enables you to evaluate the effectiveness of the training provided.

True or False?

1. Senior adults are more alike than different.
2. Significant memory loss is universal among senior adults.
3. All five senses tend to decline in old age.
4. Older workers cannot work as effectively as younger workers.
5. The majority of senior adults say they are happy most of the time.
6. Senior adults tend to take longer to learn something new.
7. The majority of senior adults are unable to adapt to change.
8. The majority of senior adults say they would like to have some kind of work to do.

[Answers: 1) F, 2) F, 3) T, 4) F, 5) T, 6) T, 7) F, 8) T]

Training Together

Sensitivity training for senior adults working with youth and for youth working with senior adults is a critical part of orientation and preservice training for both generations. It should be highly interactive and exciting. Successful sensitivity training will build the confidence of the generations, preparing them to work with one another.

If you already have some trained senior adult volunteers participating in your program, it is very effective to have the senior adults do the sensitivity training for the youth.

Both generations benefit from team-building activities which not only address concerns they may have toward working with the other generation, but will enable them to understand their worth in the program. The two generations need to feel they have common goals, and they need to feel comfortable in working together toward those goals. Senior adults and youth should be trained separately and together, allowing opportunities for interaction among themselves and between the generations.

Generation-sensitive training:

- Sensitizes participants to age-related issues
- Increases awareness about the value of linking the generations
- Relays the benefits of participation in an intergenerational program
- Dispels the myths about youth and aging
- Allows participants to see themselves as a part of the circle of life
- Creates self-awareness

Building Intergenerational Understanding Exercise

This exercise, adapted by Generations United (Scannell & Roberts, 1994), provides a way to sensitize both generations.

Growing Up and Growing Older: Confronting Ageism

I. Each of the following statements expresses a stereotype about a group of people defined only as "they." Beside each number, indicate whether you think a younger person is talking about older people (OP) or an older person is talking about young people (YP).

____ 1. They always stick together and keep their distance from other age groups.
____ 2. I hate the way they drive. They're a menace on the road.
____ 3. They're always taking and never giving. They think the world owes them a living.
____ 4. They're so opinionated. They think they know it all.
____ 5. They're never satisfied, always complaining about something.
____ 6. Don't hire them because you can't depend on them.
____ 7. They always hang around the parks and shopping malls.
____ 8. They're always so forgetful.
____ 9. I wish I had as much freedom as they have.
____ 10. They should act their age.

II. Small group discussion. Which of the above statements represent common stereotypes of young people? Of older people? Of both?

III. Class discussion. Stereotypes form the basis of prejudice and discrimination. As a teenager or older adult, have you ever experienced or known anyone who experienced prejudice or discrimination based on age? Possible occasions for age discrimination are when applying for a job, renting an apartment, or trying to participate in an activity intended for another age group.

Can both younger and older people be the victims of prejudice and discrimination based on age? Are there any other ways in which growing up is similar to growing old? What are they?

What can be done about age-based prejudice and discrimination? Do you think this is a problem that older and younger people might work on together?

Icebreaker Activities

Icebreakers are a good way to begin training sessions. In fact, all intergenerational program activities should begin with an icebreaker. These activities enable mixing among the generations and chip away at some of the initial apprehension experienced when you bring these two groups together.

These examples of intergenerational icebreakers were compiled in 1995 by Steven Tunick, Center for Intergenerational Learning at Temple University.

Concentric Circles

Arrange the chairs in two concentric circles. The inner circle should face the outer one. Ask the older adults to sit in the inner circle and the young people to sit in the outer one facing them. Everyone should have a partner. Ask a question for each pair to discuss. When they've had just enough time for each partner to speak, ask all the young people to move one seat to the right. The older adults should not move. Now everyone has a new partner. Ask a new question. Continue this for at least four rounds. Sample questions:

- What is the best and worst thing about being your age?
- What makes you proud of being a member of your cultural group?
- What are you most eager to learn about other cultural groups?

- What is the most important thing an elder has taught you?
- What is your favorite childhood memory?

They're Singing My Song

Prepare cards to distribute to group members as they enter the room. Each should have on it 4-6 lines of a popular song from any era from the 1920s to the present. Make sure that 4 or 5 people have the same card for each song. When everyone has a card, ask participants to find who is singing their song by milling around the group singing the lines of the song on their card. When they find someone else who is singing their song, instruct them to link arms and find others who are singing their song. When everyone has found their partners, ask them to rehearse their songs and sing them in front of the group. Encourage comic renditions, props, choreography, etc.

Interviews

An interview process is another way to get started. This can help older adults and students get acquainted and gain first-hand knowledge of their mutual interests and experiences. The following suggestions were contributed by Jean Angelis, Director of the Illinois Intergenerational Initiative at Southern Illinois University.

- Both participants must listen carefully, give each other an opportunity to express feelings or uncertainties, and not make judgments about the other's ideas or attitudes.
- Avoid pressuring for information if either party seems uncomfortable about a subject.
- Be alert to, and supportive of, feelings expressed by participants.

- Be aware of possible barriers to communication, such as excessive noise or hearing difficulties.
- Provide time afterwards for students to report on their interviews.
- If you use prepared questions, they should be asked and answered by both parties.

Some sample interview questions:

- When and where were you born?
- What was your childhood neighborhood like?
- How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- Who was your best friend when you were a child?
- What games did you play?
- Did you have a special food or treat that you liked?
- Did you help with chores?
- What songs do you remember singing?
- What do you remember about your first days of school?
- What are the three most important changes you've seen in your lifetime?
- What major events in history do you actually remember?
- What was the most important event in your lifetime?
- What are the most important technological advances that have occurred in your lifetime?
- What are your interests or hobbies?
- What changes would you like to see in your neighborhood?
- How do you feel about the problems of the world today?
- What exciting experiences would you like to have?
- What contributions have you made, or would like to make, that would make the world a better place to live?

Serving Together

The ice has been broken! The senior adults and youth have learned about each other and are feeling comfortable with one another. Now it is time to begin the planning of their intergenerational project.

Conducting a needs assessment of the local community together, the whole group can identify where compelling needs of the community can be met by bringing young and old together. With a large group of senior adults and youth, it might be wise to break down into smaller groups based on their interests, being sure there are both seniors and youth in each group. Finding out if they have mutual interests can occur during the icebreaker exercises.

Follow this process, adapted from one described by Generations United (Scannell & Roberts, 1994), with your intergenerational group:

Assess Needs for Service.

What do senior adults want and need? What do young people want and need?

- What are the needs that can be met by bringing old and young together?
- What will the community gain, and what will participants gain?
- Who are potential partners or contacts?
- What resources exist in the community to support your project?
- What additional information do you need?

Engage Community Partners.

Help potential partners to understand how young and old working together can benefit the entire community. Community partners can serve in a variety of roles:

- serve on advisory boards
- collaborate in program staffing
- co-produce program materials
- identify and recommend appropriate service projects
- coordinate transportation and remove barriers to participation
- participate in program planning
- identify and recruit more youth and older adult participants
- promote intergenerational service learning programs through their networks
- assist with training

Select the Projects.
Selected projects should:

- get things done in the community
- demonstrate a clear link to the stated goals and objectives
- create roles for young and old to work as resources and partners
- reinforce and foster intergenerational understanding
- be age-appropriate and ability-appropriate for the intergenerational participants
- be feasible

Reflect Together

Always keep in mind that service learning requires reflection. Reflection is an ongoing process throughout the service learning experience, and the facilitators should ensure that multiple opportunities exist for all participants to have learned not only about their community, but also about each other. By offering intergenerational participants the chance to reflect together, the reciprocity of the relationship will be strengthened.

As they reflect, questions such as the following can elicit thoughtful responses:

- How does each generation react to the issues raised by the service activity?
- What have they learned about their effectiveness as a team?
- What should they do differently next time?
- Was there a component of the service experience where older/younger members of the group were particularly effective?

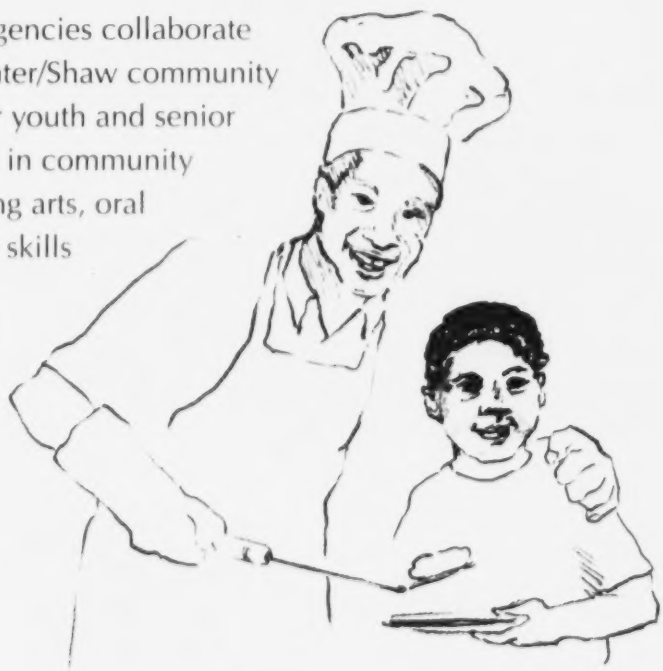
Encourage participants to also use innovative reflection techniques, incorporating music, art, drama, and other artistic forms of expression.

Examples of Intergenerational Service Learning Projects

The LINC communities in South Carolina provide seven excellent examples of how service learning projects can serve as a vehicle for joining youth and seniors in a program that will benefit participants and their communities. Involvement of participants is reciprocal between youth and senior adults, not one serving the other. An emphasis is placed on providing meaningful and consistent contact between youth and the senior adults.

- Aiken. Five hundred youth from seven schools are linked with senior adults in service learning teams. The teams participate in a campus-based nature center and wetlands development projects, heritage skills and oral history projects, nutrition education, and performing arts activities, including an intergenerational chorus.
- Belton. A three-pronged approach gives the Belton community a diverse program. In each history class, students are paired with a senior mentor to form relationships through tutorial programs, an Internet project, and oral history projects. A volunteer school club brings youth and senior adults together to address community needs, and classroom teachers may apply for mini-grants to help develop intergenerational service learning projects.
- Florence. Youth and senior adults come together to build relationships while serving the community through projects such as building parks, participating in a classroom tutorial project, working with local nursing homes, and planning performing arts projects.
- Greenwood. The Greenwood LINC project develops relationships between youth and senior adults by creating opportunities for the development of academic skills, personal skills, and community pride through tutoring and literacy programs, parenting classes, community restoration, and cultural enrichment activities.

- Irmo-Chapin. Senior adults and youth are creating a composting garden at a middle school and a local park to teach the community how to compost. Teams of teachers guide participants in the development of related projects, such as earthworm farming and planting community gardens. Community volunteers share their expertise in waste management, gardening, farm botany, and natural history with the youth.
- Kershaw. A collaborative of community organizations matches third graders in a variety of ways with senior adults, including tutoring and literacy programs, community service activities, exercise programs, and oral history and heritage skills projects.
- Sumter. Some 21 agencies collaborate to mobilize the Sumter/Shaw community by bringing together youth and senior adults to participate in community education,performing arts, oral history and heritage skills programs, and community service projects.



Possibilities for Classroom Learning

When schools embrace the service-learning methodology, they are no longer institutions isolated from the community. Rather, the total community becomes the classroom. The learning experience becomes more like "lighting fires...not just filling up buckets."

Many teachers desire to teach about aging and have older adults in their classrooms. The following may serve to trigger some additional activities that will best suit the objectives of the individual classroom.

Social Studies

For the younger student:

- Help students understand the concepts of old-older-oldest by having them apply these terms to pictures of familiar things—houses, cars, trees, pets, and people.
- Have students make a list of things they can and cannot do at their young age. Then have them examine the same lists for activities they can/cannot do as they grow older. Discuss growing older as a process of development/growth and change.

For the older student:

- Introduce and explore the topic of aging—prejudices, fears of aging, myths, stereotypes—by gathering and analyzing cartoons, comic strips, birthday cards, and common sayings.
- Invite older adults into the classroom to discuss their experiences during momentous historical periods of change such as war, immigration, recession, and the civil rights movement.
- Have students compare the roles of older adults in various cultures in the United States with those in other countries. This would be another opportunity to bring varied older adults into the classroom.
- Have students research how various acts of Congress have affected the lives of older Americans. Examples: Social Security Act, Older Americans Act, and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act.

Language Arts

For the younger student:

- Develop a list of basic words related to aging, growth, and development. Have students make flash cards with their definitions and then write sentences using the terms correctly.
- Invite older adults into the classroom to read and discuss books that are about growing old.
- Organize a pen pal program between children and older community residents. Reflection and celebration can happen when the older adults come to class to meet their pen pals.

For the older youth:

- Discuss the connotations of words/terms used to describe older adults—seniors, older adults, old people, the elderly, golden agers, and just over youth.
- Using classic literature, compare the older adult characters with contemporary images of aging. Discuss how the story may be different in a modern day setting.

Math

For the younger student:

- Develop a timeline showing the ages of the students, their siblings, parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.
- Practice addition and subtraction by working with a student's birth year as compared to the birth years of other adults.
- Practice multiplication by asking students to figure how many months, seasons, etc. they and others have lived.

For the older student:

- Design problem-solving exercises on savings and spending that youth and older adults might experience.

- Take students to an old cemetery to gather data to construct a graph of birth and death rates. Note the changes over time and the implication of the data.
- Make comparisons of money invested at various ages during the lifespan.

Physical Education

- Invite older adults into the classroom to teach younger students the physically active games that they played as youth—dodge ball, jacks, hopscotch, tag, etc. They may also share their physical activities now—dancing, racquetball, gardening, tennis, golf, or fitness workouts.
- Take the class to a nursing facility to visit a class that will demonstrate fitness activities for the frail elderly and persons with disabilities.
- Invite healthy retired athletes to discuss any limitations their age or health changes have placed on their abilities.
- Arrange for the students to work and observe at a Senior Games competition.

Technology Education

- Have students practice accessing information over the Internet by locating resources and organizations that serve older adults.
- Invite older adults with computer experience into the classroom to discuss how computer technology has changed the way they communicate or do business.
- Create an e-mail pen pal group with older adults.
- Invite older adults to participate in a computer training course taught by students.

Many intergenerational programs are not school based. However, intergenerational practitioners, when designing programs, should take a close look at service learning approaches. Participants in programs need to be challenged with meaningful activities that benefit both generations.

Evaluation

One of the most important elements of your intergenerational program is evaluation. The data collected can help you:

- determine if your program is meeting its goals
- realize if the needs of all your participants are being met
- determine if your youth and older adults are happy in the program
- will be very useful as you seek future funding sources

As you develop your intergenerational service learning project, there are some important questions you need to ask.

- Are both groups involved in all aspects of the project including planning, implementation, and evaluation?
- Are participants provided opportunities to reflect on their experiences and the issues that may have been raised in linking the generations?
- Are they provided opportunities to celebrate their successes?

You can collect information for the evaluation of your program through written surveys or direct interviews throughout the project implementation period.

A written survey tends to be much easier and allows respondents the opportunity to remain anonymous if they so desire. A disadvantage is that many people may not return the survey or will give short inconclusive answers to the questions. Younger students and some older adults may need some help in completing the form.

The interview technique takes lots more effort but the extra work may be rewarded with more information and higher quality answers.

Whichever method of evaluation you choose, be sure to get feedback from a sample of all participants in your program.

Final Thoughts

Intergenerational programs can be enriched by using the principles of service learning. Also, practitioners in the service learning field can benefit by including older adults in their programs. Older adults need to have opportunities for continued learning and growth. Too often they are cut off from the mainstream of society and are lonely and lose their self-worth. By sharing their life experiences and skills with youth in service learning programs, they find new meaning in their lives. Young people can gain a broader life perspective and become better able to confront the dynamics of change.

Service learning and intergenerational programs should be a natural connection. The youth, older adults, and the community will benefit.

It is clear that most people agree that young people need to learn and understand the aging process and related issues and that older adults need to interact and build relationships with young people.

Schools can make a major difference in the lives of young people and older adults in their communities. In order to meet these needs, school board members, administrators, counselors, teachers, curriculum coordinators, staff development personnel, textbook authors and publishers, parents, and grandparents must all assume their roles to assure that young people are academically prepared for the age-related issues in our society.

Resources

For more information on service learning and intergenerational programs you may contact:

- South Carolina Department of Education
  Office of Community Education 906 Rutledge Building
  1429 Senate Street, Columbia, SC 29201
  Phone: 803-734-9344 www.state.sc.us/sde/
- Corporation for National Service
  1201 New York Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20525
  202-606-5000 www.nationalservice.org
- The Center for Intergenerational Learning
  Temple University
  1601 North Broad St., Room 206, Philadelphia, PA 19122
  215-204-6970 www.temple.edu/departments/CIL
- Generations Together
  University of Pittsburgh
  121 University Place, Suite 300, Pittsburgh, PA 15260
  412-648-7150 www.pitt.edu/~gti
- Generations United
  440 First St. NW, Suite 480, Washington, DC 20001
  202-662-4283 www.gu.org
- The National Council on Aging
  409 Third St., NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20024
  202-479-1200
- National Recreation and Parks Association
  22377 Belmont Ridge Rd., Ashburn, VA 20148-0784
  703-858-0784 www.nrpa.org/nrpa
- National Service Learning Clearinghouse
  University of Minnesota
  1954 Buford Avenue, Room R460, St. Paul, MN 55108
  800-808-SERV www.nicsl.coled.umn.edu

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Interchange (1995). Philadelphia, PA: Center for Intergenerational Learning, Temple University.

Scannell, T., & Roberts, A. (1994). *Young and old serving together: Meeting community needs through intergenerational partnerships.* Washington, DC: Generations United

Teaching about aging. (1997). Washington, DC: National Retired Teachers Association, a division of AARP and the National Academy for Teaching and Learning About Aging.

About intergenerational programs (1996). Ashburn, VA: National Recreation and Parks Association.

South Carolina Department of Education
Office of Community Education
1429 Senate Street, 906 Rutledge Building, Columbia, SC 29201
Telephone: 803-734-4915 http://www.state.sc.us/sde

National Dropout Prevention Center
College of Health, Education, and Human Development
Clemson University, 209 Martin Street, Clemson, SC 29634-0726
Telephone 864-656-2599 e-mail: ndpc@clemson.edu
www.dropoutprevention.org